



2004 MICHIGAN DEER HUNTING PROSPECTS

THE STATEWIDE FORECAST

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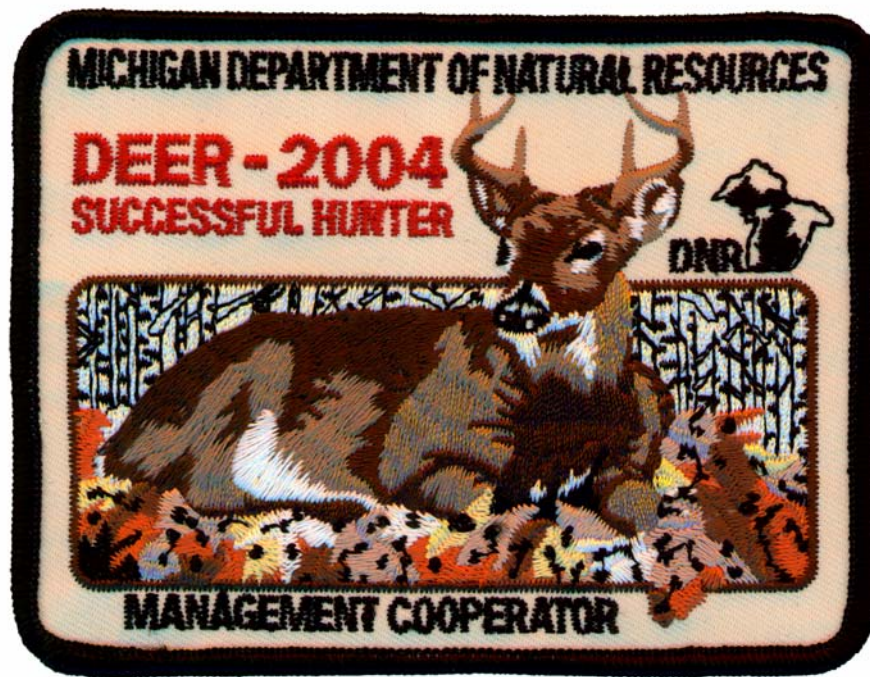
The 2004 deer hunting season is expected to be similar to last years season when an estimated harvest of 500,000 deer, about the size of Michigan's deer herd in 1970, were taken. Hunters will spend more than 10 million days enjoying deer hunting recreation during archery, firearm, and muzzleloading seasons combined*. This is more deer hunting than in any other state or Canadian province. Deer hunting in Michigan is big business. An expected 775,000 individuals will purchase at least one deer license in 2004 and spend more than \$500 million for food, lodging, transportation, and equipment to pursue deer in Michigan.

Biologists estimate Michigan's statewide fall whitetail population to be about the same as it has been in recent years, still above the statewide goal. This deer herd is dynamic and therefore not evenly distributed across the state. Most of the deer population resides on private land. In the last decade the southern half of the Lower Peninsula has contributed an increasing percentage of the statewide deer population. For the last two years, the estimated Southern Michigan deer harvest exceeded the combined estimated harvest for Northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula. The DNR's goal is to maintain a quality deer herd that is in balance with its habitat and yields healthy fawns, does, and bucks.

The DNR provides about 90 deer check stations around the state to help evaluate and monitor Michigan's deer herd. Hunters are encouraged to bring in their deer or deer head, to share valuable information with the Department and earn a 2004 Deer Management Cooperator patch.

Biologist will be collecting deer heads from hunters' wishing to cooperate in the ongoing statewide surveillance for Chronic Wasting Disease and bovine tuberculosis.

- * Archery deer hunting season is open from October 1 through November 14 and December 1 through January 2. Firearm season is November 15 through 30, and muzzleloading season is December 4 through 12 in the Upper Peninsula and December 10 through 19 in the Lower Peninsula. An early (October 9 to October 17) antlerless firearm deer hunting is in the special regulations (TB) counties. Youth firearm season is September 25 & 26, statewide. Disabled hunters season is October 16 & 17, statewide. Late antlerless firearm season is December 20 through January 2, on private land in only 20 DMU's in the Lower Peninsula.



Stewardship

Today deer live in the near absence of natural predators in most parts of the state. Furthermore, the whitetails' reproductive capability and their ability to adapt to the variety of habitats across the state has resulted in a Michigan deer herd around 1.75 million animals. This is exciting to citizens who enjoy hunting or observing deer, but is problematic to the habitat and the overall ecosystem. Deer in most parts of Michigan have a higher birth rate than death rate each year. Without controls, Michigan's deer population will continue to exceed the overall statewide goal. The number of deer in an area will impact the quality and quantity of habitat, deer productivity, and deer/human conflicts. Harvesting deer through hunting helps to keep the deer herd in balance with its habitat. Today's hunter plays a vital role as a predator. Wild free-ranging deer must be managed, and recreational hunting is the best method to provide that management. A regulated hunter-harvest of both sexes is necessary to maintain a healthy and thriving deer population. The expected statewide harvest is targeted to be approximately an equal number of antlered and antlerless deer. Antlerless quotas are established to achieve a desired harvest of antlerless deer for that geographic area.

Upper Peninsula (UP)

Deer in the southern 2/3 of the UP experienced a more severe winter than normal. Winter losses were minimal but fawn production is expected to be below normal across this area. The Lake Superior watershed experienced a normal winter resulting in a similar or slightly larger deer population compared to last year. The highest deer numbers will be seen in the south-central part of the UP

(Menominee, Delta, Dickinson, Iron, and southern Marquette counties). The UP buck harvest is expected to be normal or slightly above, which will produce a good buck harvest. Some counties in the UP still have more deer than desired by the Department. Antlerless deer hunting opportunities on private farm lands this year may help to reduce the population. Remember, only public land antlerless licenses are valid on Commercial Forest Land this year.

Northern Lower Peninsula (NLP)

The deer herd in the NLP is about the same or slightly lower than in 2003. Buck harvest is expected to be similar to last year. The antlerless deer harvest is expected to be down. The herd in this part of the state has been intentionally reduced. At that time, car-deer crashes and crop damage were at unacceptable, record levels. The deer herd remains over goal in a few DMU's but is at or below goal in many others. There are fewer DMU's open to take antlerless deer on public land than in 2003. However, to help eradicate bovine tuberculosis (TB) in deer, a large number of antlerless deer licenses in the bovine TB positive counties will be continued. Leftover public land antlerless licenses in these seven county special regulations units will be sold over the counter until the quota is reached.

Southern Lower Peninsula (SLP)

The southern Michigan deer herd appears to be stabilizing in some areas, and 2004 deer hunters should see deer numbers and deer harvest similar to 2003. However, the 2004 herd remains at or above the desired levels in most areas, and the number of deer in much of southern Michigan is exceeding public tolerance for damage. The Department is responding to concerns of too many deer in this part of the state with significant numbers of antlerless deer licenses for hunting on private lands. SLP should produce some of the best white-tailed deer hunting in the nation for both antlered and antlerless deer. With the landowners' permission, hunting in or near standing corn can be productive. The same 12 counties in SLP are open to the late antlerless only firearm season as last year. Check the 2004 hunting and trapping guide for the open counties.

WESTERN UPPER PENINSULA MANAGEMENT UNIT

(Baraga, Delta, Dickinson, Gogebic, Houghton, Iron, Keweenaw, Marquette, Menominee, Ontonagon and west ½ of Alger counties)

Contact: Robert Doecker

Deer numbers in the Western Upper Peninsula (WUP) Management Unit will be similar to last year. Expect improved buck hunting success in northern portions of the WUP and success similar to last year in the south. More antlerless permits are available this year, compared to last year, due to increased deer numbers in portions of the moderate snowfall areas. The severity of winter weather is a major factor determining the number, physical development (including antler development) and productivity of deer in the WUP. In addition to winter weather

severity, the timing of spring green-up impacts overwinter deer survival and productivity. This year, the WUP experienced an unusually wet, cool spring resulting in delayed green-up of ground vegetation. The delayed spring green-up will reduce newborn fawn survival. Deer in the southern portions of the WUP experienced an unusually stressful winter, with snow depths approaching 2 feet through mid-March. The stressful winter weather coupled with a delayed spring green-up has combined to lower deer densities in the south. The positive aspect to slightly lower deer densities in southern portions of the WUP will be improved physical size and antler development of bucks. Deer wintering in northern areas experienced average or slightly below average winter conditions. Deer numbers remain highest in the southern agricultural areas of Delta, Menominee and Dickinson Counties. Good deer numbers are present in the primarily forested middle portion of the WUP. Deer densities are lowest in the northern 1/3 of the WUP. Leftover public land antlerless licenses will be sold over the counter until the quota is reached for Deer Management Units in the WUP.

GOGEBIC, ONTONAGON, BARAGA, KEWEENAW and HOUGHTON COUNTIES - Rob Aho: 906-353-6651

Deer experienced a milder winter in 2003-2004 compared to the previous winter; the Winter Severity Index was about 10% less than the WSI in 2002-2003. Milder weather resulted in less overwinter deer mortality. However, poor fawn production and survival in 2003 have kept deer numbers below the 2000 levels. Thus, antlerless license quotas have been reduced in Deer Management Unit (DMU) 027. In DMU 066, concerns about agricultural and horticultural deer damage and motor vehicle accidents in the eastern and western portions of the unit have resulted in a substantial increase in private land antlerless licenses (that have already sold out). These must be used on non-Commercial Forest Reserve lands, where they will do the most good to control deer problems. Some acorns are being seen, but they are on the small size in many areas. Successful hunters are asked to contribute deer heads (60 per county) for ongoing surveillance for Chronic Wasting Disease and Bovine Tuberculosis.

IRON AND DICKINSON COUNTIES - Douglas Wagner: 906-875-6622

Deer numbers continue to recover from the harsh winters of 1995 - 1997. Deer in northeast Iron and northern Dickinson counties, which experienced particularly high over winter deer mortality at that time, continue to gradually increase and should show moderate increases again this year. Highest concentrations of deer are found in south Dickinson and southern Iron counties. Northwest Iron County continues to support moderate numbers of deer and a more stable deer population over time. Antler development should be average to slightly above average, due to a mild start to the 2003-2004 winter, even though spring green-up was delayed.

DELTA AND MENOMINEE COUNTIES - Craig Albright: 906-786-2351

The winter of 2003-2004 began with mild conditions for deer in the south-central U.P. However, winter weather worsened in late January as temperatures dropped and snow depths increased. From late February through late March, snow depths approached 2 feet on the level. Citizen reports and spring surveys conducted by the DNR revealed considerable mortality of deer, primarily fawns, during this late winter period. As a result, deer numbers in fall 2004 are expected to be somewhat lower than last fall in many localities. A positive result is lower deer numbers result in improved regeneration and growth of trees, shrubs and ground vegetation that deer use for food. This often translates into better body size, antler development, and fawn production.

Deer will be most plentiful on the agricultural landscape of southern Menominee and western Delta counties. An early firearm season will again be held on private lands in Deer Management Unit 055 from Sept. 16-22. This season, which targets only antlerless deer, will provide landowners with extra opportunity to address crop damage and tree regeneration problems. Private Land Antlerless Deer Licenses are still available in many deer management units, and they can be purchased at a rate of one per day until the quota is reached. These antlerless licenses are valid during all seasons with appropriate equipment to match the season.

Extensively forested areas usually have fewer deer than agricultural areas, particularly heavily-hunted sectors of state and national forest land. Consequently, antlerless deer license quotas for Public Land are usually smaller than for Private Land. Pre-season scouting, and persistence, improves deer sightings and chances for harvesting a deer.

Many hunters in the south-central U.P. voluntarily choose to bypass young bucks so they can grow older and larger. Instead of harvesting a spikehorn or forkhorn buck, they choose to use an antlerless license to acquire venison. Hunters should be aware, however, that mandatory antler restrictions are in place in Deer Management Units 122, 152, 155, and 252. These units are within portions of Dickinson, Delta, Marquette, and Alger counties and are "quality deer management" test areas. Bucks must have 3 or more points on one side to be legal in these units.

MARQUETTE AND WEST ALGER COUNTIES - Michael Koss: 906-346-9201

Deer hunters should not expect major changes from what they have experienced in the past few years. The winter of 2003-2004 was more severe than experienced in the last few years, and was actually near the long term average for this area. However, deer numbers are reduced from the levels prior to the

severe winter of 2000-2001, so the relative impact was muted. Deer in the Lake Superior watershed (high snowfall zone) had a tough winter as usual, and deer numbers are similar to 2003. Deer further south (moderate snowfall zone) didn't have an easy winter either, but fared better than deer in the low snowfall zone. Deer in portions of West Alger County and in Delta County were the most impacted by winter weather and consequently, deer numbers are lower than last year. In the moderate snowfall zone, deer numbers are similar to 2003. Despite the challenges of last winter, there seems to be a reasonable fawn crop this year, at least in the southern half of the area.

Deer numbers are highest in the agricultural areas of west Alger County, and the extreme southern portion of Marquette counties. "Fair" deer numbers are found in the forested zones in Deer Management Units (DMUs) 155, 255, 152, 252, and 021. Lower deer numbers are found north of these areas.

Hunting success will be similar to recent years. Most of the area is "bucks only" hunting, with some antlerless hunting available in the south, primarily on private lands. Experimental antler restrictions exist in DMUs 155, 152, and 252, which require a legal buck to have at least 3 antler points on at least one antler

EASTERN UPPER PENINSULA MANAGEMENT UNIT

(Chippewa, east ½ Alger, Luce, Mackinac and Schoolcraft counties)

Contact: Tom Weise at 906-293-5131

Overall hunters can expect to see about the same number of deer this season as they did last year. Deer numbers are still good and will provide favorable hunting opportunities. A more normal winter in 2003-2004 was experienced with a somewhat delayed and cool spring, but a nice summer with adequate rainfall so the deer will be going into the winter in good condition. Other factors, primarily weather, will play a major role in determining hunter success this year. Weather influences deer movements, hunter activity, and access. We expect the 2004 harvest to be very similar to last year.

Wildlife Division will be collecting 60 deer heads for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) testing from all counties in 2004. Hunters need to help by donating their deer heads for testing. Usually Alger and Luce Counties are the most difficult counties to obtain the quota of heads so people who hunt in these areas can help by checking their deer and donating heads. All heads tested for CWD will also be tested for TB.

Eastern Alger and Schoolcraft counties—Terry Minzey

Hunters will find more deer and deer hunters in the southern portion of the unit. The agricultural areas tend to support a higher deer population than forested areas; deer from farm country tend to be at a higher nutritional plane and therefore support larger antlers than animals of the same age in forested systems.

Deer numbers decrease from south to north with lowest densities in the Lake Superior snow belt. The buck to doe ratio appears somewhat higher in the north. The northern areas have some of the lowest hunter densities providing a place to hunt for those who like to get away from hunting pressure.

Chippewa and East Mackinac counties—Rex Ainslie

Deer numbers are slightly above the desired population level for Chippewa and Mackinac Counties. Higher deer densities are to be found on private lands and particularly in the agricultural areas. Overall, deer densities are generally higher in the southern portions of the area and lower as one travels north. Hunters can expect to see about the same number of deer as last year. The "no spike" rule is still in effect for Drummond Island so hunters should be aware of that rule.

Luce County and West Mackinac—Kristie Sitar

Deer densities in the northern portions of Luce County may be lower later in the deer season as deer move to winter range in more southern regions of Luce and Mackinac counties. Deer numbers are generally higher in the southern agricultural areas of Mackinac County and along the Lake Michigan shoreline than in northern areas. Hunter densities are typically lower in northern regions of the area.

NORTHEAST MANAGEMENT UNIT

(Alcona, Alpena, Antrim, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Crawford, Emmet, Iosco, Montmorency, Ogemaw, Oscoda, Otsego, Presque Isle and Roscommon counties)

Contact: Glen Matthews, 989-732-3541

The Northeast Management Unit will begin the fall season with a deer population that is similar to the past two years. Although last winter was moderately difficult, winter mortality was relatively low and fawn production appears to have been good. In some areas, the deer population remains above goal level. A buck harvest similar to 2002 and 2003 is expected. Overall, the number of antlerless licenses available will result in a deer harvest composed of approximately 50% antlerless deer. The private land antlerless license quota continues to be liberal

in many deer management units; the public land antlerless licenses are fewer in several deer management units.

Best success rates will be experienced in the mixed agricultural and forest land areas of Iosco, Ogemaw and western Antrim and Charlevoix Counties. Alpena and Alcona County hunters will have good success rates, though slightly lower than in past years. Public lands in Alcona, Crawford, Montmorency and Roscommon Counties will provide good opportunities to hunt deer.

Acorn production appears to be significantly better than last year. Red oaks are producing modest mast in quite a few locations and where they are still available in November; hunters will be taking advantage of them. Deer will also be foraging on the ground in open areas, farm fields and lowlands until snowcover.

There is a continuing need for deer samples for the bovine TB surveillance effort. Deer hunters are urged to locate a check station and submit their deer head for testing. During the firearms season, all stations that were open last year will be operating.

Very few elk are accidentally shot by deer hunters, however, those coming to the elk range in southern Cheboygan, northern Otsego, southwest Presque Isle and Montmorency Counties are reminded to be careful and avoid the unintended shooting of an elk.

NORTHWEST MANAGEMENT UNIT

(Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Lake, Leelanau, Manistee, Mason, Mecosta, Missaukee, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola and Wexford counties)

Contact: Penney Melchoir, (231) 775-9727

The deer population in this management unit is near the management goal as a result of antlerless deer harvest in recent years. Deer survival through last winter was average, but the wet, cold spring may have reduced early fawn survival. Lower numbers of twin fawns have been seen in non-agricultural areas. Overall the buck harvest should be similar to 2003, but the antlerless harvest may be lower due to a 22% reduction in the number of antlerless permits.

Deer numbers in the northern counties (Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau) are similar to 2003. No antlerless permits are available for public land, and only a limited number were available for private land. The buck harvest should be similar to last year with better opportunities on private lands, particularly those near agricultural areas. Acorn and beechnut production is spotty, and will be a strong attraction for deer. Leelanau County enters its second season under QDM harvest regulations, limiting buck harvest to animals

with 3 or more points on at least one beam. A lighter buck harvest in 2003 should increase the proportion of older bucks in Leelanau County this fall.

Four of the central counties (Manistee, Mason, Missaukee, and Osceola) are at management goal. Deer numbers are lower than recent years, but buck harvest should be similar to 2003. In the two central counties of Lake and Wexford deer numbers are below goal, and both buck and antlerless harvest will be lower than in 2003. In all the central counties, the best hunting opportunities will be on private land. State and federal lands are extensive in these counties and can also provide good hunting opportunity where natural foods are present. Acorn and beechnut production is again spotty this year with very few white oak acorns. Antler development appears to be average this year.

For the southern counties, Oceana County is slightly below deer population goal, Newaygo is slightly above goal, and Mecosta County remains significantly above goal. Crop damage was up in all three counties this summer. The best hunting opportunities will once again be found on privately owned agricultural lands, so hunters are encouraged to contact landowners for permission to hunt these lands. Hunters in Oceana and Newaygo Counties will have seasons similar to last year, and hunters in Mecosta County hunters will see lots of deer.

SAGINAW BAY MANAGEMENT UNIT

(Arenac, Bay, Clare, Gladwin, Huron, Isabella, Midland, Saginaw, Sanilac and Tuscola Counties)

Contact: Tim Reis, 989-684-9141

Whitetail deer numbers remain slightly above population goal in many portions of the Saginaw Bay Management Unit.

In the "Thumb" area deer numbers are greater than last year. The availability of antlerless licenses on private lands has been increased in Tuscola County, but remains the same for Sanilac and Huron counties. Hunters should expect a good season. The only thing that might impact hunter success is a late corn harvest, which is very possible this year due to a wet spring and cool summer. Deer hunters are encouraged to take antlerless deer in all Thumb counties to assist with achieving population goals.

Deer populations seem to be at or above population levels in Bay, Saginaw, Isabella, and Midland counties. The biggest issue for hunters this year will probably be corn conditions. Many fields were planted very late this year, likely resulting in standing corn up through more of the season than usual.

Deer population levels remain stable in Gladwin County and slightly above population goals in Arenac and Clare counties. Hunters can anticipate similar hunting results in Gladwin and Clare counties compared to last season. The

harvest should be slightly up in eastern Arenac County. Mast crops are very limited in the northern portion of the unit. Late standing agricultural crops may also concentrate deer on private lands. DMU 118 has been dissolved and is now part of DMU 18.

The deer population on the Shiawassee Flats is above goal. Deer hunting on public lands of the Shiawassee Flats in Saginaw County is by permit only. The deadline for pre-registered hunts on the Shiawassee River State Game Area and the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge was in early September and early August, respectively. For additional information about deer hunting on the Shiawassee River State Game Area call the St. Charles Field Office at (989) 865-6211, and for information about deer hunting on the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge call the refuge headquarters at (989) 777-5930.

SOUTH EASTERN MANAGEMENT UNIT

(Genesee, Lapeer, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, St. Clair, and Wayne counties)

Contact: Tim Payne, 734-953-0241

Hunters are reminded that many of the more urban southeastern communities have various forms of firearm closures. However, good archery hunting opportunities still exist in many areas. Hunters should contact their local units of governments for questions dealing with these closures. Hunters should be especially careful in hunting these more urban areas and be thinking safety at all times. Respect the property rights of others are the best way to insure future hunting privileges for you and others. Do not trespass on lands of another without their permission. Hunting is still the most efficient method for controlling deer numbers and is an essential method for managing the Management Unit's population.

Hunters need to scout potential hunting areas early as it is often difficult to gain access to private lands once the season starts. There are some private lands open to hunting under the Hunting Access on Private Lands (HAP) program. Hunters are encouraged to check the HAP guide for these locations.

Oakland, Genesee, and Lapeer: Julie Oakes 248-328-8113

Oakland County- Deer population is stable, with highest deer numbers seen in NE Oakland County. Hunters who have access to private land should find good deer hunting. Expect high hunting pressure on public land during the first two days of firearm season.

Genesee- Overall deer population is good. There are no state lands in Genesee County, so all deer hunting efforts will take place on private lands. Deer have

good antler development due to the amount of farming still taking place in this county.

Lapeer- The deer population is good and still at levels higher than desired. The Lapeer State Game Area is over 8000 acres and supports a stable deer herd. This game area should offer good hunting opportunity, but note that deer numbers are still higher on private lands.

Monroe and Wayne County: Joe Robison: 734-379-9692

The deer population in Monroe County has been on a slight downward trend over the past 3-4 years. Liberal antlerless regulations in recent years have brought the herd closer to population goal. There are still a few localized areas that have higher deer populations mostly in Western Monroe County. Weather conditions and timing of crop harvests will certainly have an impact on hunting success. There are limited state lands in Wayne County, so most deer hunting efforts will take place on private lands. Respecting the property rights of others is the best way to insure future hunting privileges for yourself and others. Do not trespass on lands of another without their permission. Deer population levels in Wayne County are similar to last year.

St. Clair and Macomb: Ernie Kafcas: 586-465-7214

The cool wet spring didn't appear to impact deer productivity. Expect to see good numbers of deer with fall 2004 deer numbers to be similar and in some localized areas higher than last year. Overall fewer crops were planted in 2004 than 2003 with less corn and more soybeans. There is no reason to believe that buck harvest will not meet or exceed the 2003 harvest. There is very little state land in Macomb County. The Port Huron State Game area has good deer numbers.

SOUTH CENTRAL MANAGEMENT UNIT

(Clinton, Eaton, Gratiot, Hillsdale, Ingham, Ionia, Jackson, Lenawee, Livingston, Montcalm, Shiawassee and Washtenaw counties)

Contact: David Dominic, 517-373-9358

The South Central Management Unit should again lead the state in total deer harvest due to excellent habitat conditions and high deer populations. It is unknown to what extent the cold, wet spring may have had on fawn production, however all 12 of the Management Unit's counties continue to be above their deer population goals. Despite high numbers of deer throughout the region, harvest may be slightly down this year. Corn is not maturing as quickly as in 2003 because of cool temperatures. A significant portion of the corn may not be

harvested by November 15 and a late corn harvest could decrease the deer harvest due to the increased escape cover provided by standing corn. The expected buck and antlerless harvest should be slightly less than the 2003 season; however local crop harvest, hunter pressure and weather may influence hunting conditions and overall harvest rates. The counties with the highest deer populations are Jackson, Montcalm, Ionia and Washtenaw. An adequate quota for private land antlerless deer licenses has been established in hopes of lowering the deer populations in problem areas. The goal is to lower the deer population throughout most of the Management Unit and private land access is the key to being successful. Hunters need to start early scouting and acquiring access to these lands.

Hunters are encouraged to use antlerless licenses to harvest deer in all seasons, including the late antlerless season on private land, which will be open in four of our twelve counties (Ionia, Jackson, Lenawee, and Hillsdale). Natural deer foods, including acorns and apples, appear to be above average throughout the Management Unit this year.

Hunters are encouraged to have their deer checked at one of the many Deer Check Stations throughout the state. A Michigan Deer Cooperator patch will be given to hunters that participate. Antlerless deer are of special interest.

Washtenaw County: This year's population is substantially over goal. Harvest for both antlered and antlerless deer is expected to be similar to the harvest of 2003. There is no late antlerless season in Washtenaw County and hunters are encouraged to take antlerless deer in earlier seasons.

Lenawee County: This year's population is substantially over goal. The 2004 harvest is expected to be similar to that in 2003. The 2002 buck harvest was one of the highest in many years, and the buck harvest for 2004 is expected to be slightly lower than that in 2002.

Jackson County: This year's population is over goal. It is expected that harvest will be similar to 2003.

Hillsdale County: This year's population is over goal. Harvest of antlered and antlerless deer is expected to be similar to 2003.

Montcalm County: This year's population is, once again, well over goal. While populations are similar to the last few years and appear to be stabilizing, a likely late corn harvest may result in a slight decrease in the 2004 harvest of both antlered and antlerless deer from 2003. Hunters are reminded that there will be no late antlerless season in Montcalm County so hunters are encouraged to fill their antlerless tags early.

Ionia County: This year's population is well over goal and continues to grow. However, due to a likely late corn harvest, the harvest of antlered and antlerless deer is expected to be down slightly from the 2003 season.

Eaton County: This year's population is stable compared to 2002 and 2003, just slightly over goal. However, due to a likely late corn harvest, the harvest of antlered and antlerless deer is expected to be down slightly from the 2003 season.

Gratiot, Clinton, Shiawassee, Ingham and Livingston Counties:

The 5-county area will enter the fall deer season with a herd population that is slightly higher than in 2003. Liberal antlerless regulations in recent years have not brought the herd closer to goal. The buck and antlerless harvest is expected to be slightly above the harvest of 2003.

SOUTH WESTERN MANAGEMENT UNIT

(Allegan, Barry, Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, Kent, Muskegon, Ottawa, St. Joseph and Van Buren counties)

Contact: Sara Schaefer, 269-685-6851

Deer populations have generally stabilized in the unit, but many counties continue to have deer populations above established deer population goals. Deer numbers continue to be very high in Barry, Calhoun and Kent counties. Localized areas in Cass, Branch, Kalamazoo, Allegan, Van Buren and Ottawa counties also have higher than desired deer populations. Deer are becoming increasingly numerous in semi-urban and residential areas throughout southwest Michigan.

The corn harvest dates should be slightly later than normal this fall due to the wet, cool weather this spring and summer. Hard mast production is variable, due to late spring frosts that affected some areas in the unit. Most fruits and berries are plentiful.

Antlerless licenses are once again under a quota allocation in all southwest deer management units. However, hunters may purchase one private land antlerless license per day until the quota for that area is reached. All southwest deer management units have excess private land licenses. Hunters are urged to review the deer management unit numbering system to assure that they are obtaining licenses for the proper area. Hunters should check in the hunting and trapping guide to determine which counties will be open for the late antlerless firearm deer season

Hunters are urged to take advantage of the opportunity to assist in the proper management of the deer herd, and continue to harvest adequate numbers of

antlerless deer to maintain the population at goal or continue to decrease the population as desired. As the herd decreases to desired population goals, the number of antlered bucks will also naturally be fewer and buck harvest will decrease. However, average body size of all deer and the average antler size of bucks should increase. Thus, hunters should expect to see fewer deer, but a slightly higher percentage of larger bucks with potentially larger antlers. This trend should continue as hunters, landowners and the state cooperate in deer management. To achieve these improvements in the population, hunters need to continue an aggressive harvest of adult antlerless deer.

The deer harvest in 2003 was an average harvest year. In areas where deer populations remain above goal, additional harvest of adult antlerless deer will be necessary in 2004. It appears there was an average to slightly below average fawn crop in 2004. Areas that experienced heavy spring rainfall and below average temperatures, may have experienced reduced fawn production in 2004. Hunters should take extra care to identify an antlerless deer as a button buck or adult doe. The harvest of adult does best manages the deer population.

Landowners in areas of high deer populations appear to be willing to allow responsible hunters on their property. It is important to remember that access opportunities are most available to hunters who project a sportsmanship image and contact the landowner well before the season.